

US Advisory Group Responds to Biden's Plan

In late 2020, the United States elected Joe Biden as president after a fractured and polarized four years. After running a campaign to "Build Back Better," Biden came into office on the heels of a global pandemic and a weakened economy. One of Biden's first actions as president was to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and bring climate policy back into infrastructure discussions. As part of the American Jobs Plan, which the administration is still trying to push through Congress at the time of this writing, the president and his staff have focused on making climate policy a pillar of infrastructure policy. This proposal is a large infrastructure package meant to both employ Americans by reinvesting in necessary infrastructure that has gone neglected for years and bring the United States to competition levels with other strong economies with sustainable infrastructure and climate change solutions. Some of the proposed projects emphasize sustainable transportation. This proposal has not yet made it into law.

ITDP is lucky to have so many thoughtful leaders who advise our organization at large, and our program work in the United States. We have asked these advisors and board members to comment on their expectations, concerns, and hopes.



Janette Sadik-Khan, Principal, Bloomberg Associates, ITDP Board of Directors

Transportation policy is climate policy and economic policy. It's a key to achieving greater equity, racial justice, and increasing access to opportunity by bringing more people within reach of jobs, schools, and services. The Biden administration recognizes that there is no recovery without significant and sustained transportation investment, and that creating safer, more accessible and affordable ways for people to get around is as essential as restoring power lines, bridges, and roads damaged by natural disasters.



Beth Osborne, Director, Transportation for America, ITDP US Advisory Group

The best indicator of future behavior is past behavior and past behavior makes me believe we will get a lot more money for the same thing we've already gotten. Advocates are trying to influence small amounts of money for the things they want to see, while much larger amounts are dedicated to the same old things. So far, this Administration has made statements but actions have yet to follow. It is early yet, so I haven't been loud about my skepticism, but I will get really loud about it if things don't change by the fall [of 2021].



Tilly Chang, Executive Director, San Francisco County Transportation Authority, ITDP US Advisory Group

The historic American Jobs Plan infrastructure proposal is a transformative strategy for both the short-term and long-run, boosting job creation and our nation's competitiveness while investing in equitable access, safety and climate solutions for future generations. We are excited to re-imagine our infrastructure to re-knit communities and upgrade bus

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and rail transit, especially for those most reliant on public transportation.



Chrystal Kornegay, Executive Director, MassHousing, ITDP US Advisory Group

Public transportation is essential to keeping our economy going as evidenced by the past year. While work patterns changed for many, essential workers supported folks who were working from home, and these essential workers mostly relied on public transportation. Investing in public transportation such that it is sustainable, particularly to the people that were deemed essential during this pandemic, is a way to have a lasting, equitable impact.



Michael Repogle, Founder, ITDP; Former Deputy Commissioner for Policy, New York City, Department of Transportation; ITDP Board of Directors

This past year has demonstrated the value of creating more nimble administrative procedures. In New York City, in the wake of COVID, thousands of parking spaces were dedicated to Open Streets and Open Restaurants programs. This quick reallocation saved businesses, jobs, and brought life back to the streets in a dark time. By removing the usual red tape, these programs happened quickly and with much success. The new administration could learn from this approach.

The Biden administration needs to enable and strengthen local government capacity across America by providing more direct aid to cities supportive of key priorities, with fewer strings attached. Some of this can be done by executive agency action, but to take it to scale will require authorization of new flexible programs in the American Jobs Plan and transportation reauthorization bills.

The administration in early 2021 secured vital congressional support for funding that kept many transit agencies and cities from collapse in the wake of great economic disruption due to COVID. The Senate's infrastructure bill has many good things, but its vastly expanded highway funding is likely to reinforce car-dependence and spur sprawl, while falling short on funding needed to improve public transportation, walking and cycling, infrastructure for electric vehicles, and reconnection of communities severed by highways. The House of Representatives needs to ensure the American Jobs Plan sent for President Biden's signature will support a true shift in transportation, climate, and economic policy, not just more of the same with new twists. We cannot afford to wait any longer for change.